DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 120 770 CS 202 627

AUTHOR Whittaker, Susan McDargh
TITLE Male vs. Female Newscasters--A Study of the Relative Effectiveness, Believability and Acceptance.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism (Ottowa, Canada, August 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Broadcast Industry; *Credibility; Journalism; Media Research; *News Reporting; *Radio; *Sex Differences; *Sex Discrimination

ABSTRACT

The assumption, which has influenced broadcast news reporting hiring practices, that women broadcasters are not as believable, acceptable, or effective as men broadcasters is explored in this research report. Four network newscasters, two males and two females chosen on the basis of similar professional competency and stature audio tape in "network style" which contained two versions of a newscast. Each newscast contained two categories of stories--factual and fictitious. The sample audience totaled 174 men and women who represented a rather broad socio-economic and age distribution. Each of eight audience groups heard two newscasts--one delivered by a male and one delivered by a female newscaster. Subjects were asked to fill out a multiple-choice questionnaire designed to measure factors of effectiveness, general retention, and believability. A second questionnaire was designed to study acceptance and preference. Some of the findings indicated that there was no significant difference in the audience's degree of acceptance of either male or female newscaster, newscasters of both sexes appeared to be equally effective, and sex preference was equally divided. (MKM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED120770

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Susan McDargh Whittaker

MALE VS. FEMALE NEWSCASTERS--A STUDY OF THE RELATIVE EFFECTIVENESS, BELIEVABILITY AND ACCEPTANCE*

The broadcast industry has been dominated by men since the time of Marconi. This has been especially true in the area of broadcast news reporting, where employment practices have apparently been based on long-held but relatively untested assumptions about the relative lack of effectiveness and believability of female newscasters. Many of the decision makers in radio and television news have reportedly assumed that their audiences would not accept women as serious on-air reporters. For example, in 1971, Reuven Frank, President of NBC News, was quoted as saying, "I have the strong feeling that audiences are less prepared to accept news from a woman's voice than from a man's."[1] Although attitudes have changed somewhat in recent years, employment figures or women working in broadcast news departments still corroborate such attitudes in broadcast news.

There has been very little research done in this area to either support or contradict such attitudes. Most of the studies that have been done have simply provided survey evidence that these attitudes exist on the part of those responsible for broadcast news operations. Little experimental research has been done to discover whether broadcast audiences, themselves, find women to be less believable, acceptable or effective, compared to their male counterparts. These facts, together

---

*This study was made possible by a research grant from the National Association of Broadcasters.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Susan McDargh Whittaker
TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

CS 802 627

with the growing pressure on the broadcast industry from government agencies and citizen's groups, because of alledged sex discrimination practices in broadcasting, made a research study in this area particularly timely and significant.

Related Research

Only three previous studies were found which were related to this general research concern. In 1965, Kienzle, using a survey approach, sent out questionnaires to newspaper editors and broadcast news directors in all 50 states to try to determine the attitudes of news directors and editors toward hiring women. In the broadcast area it was found that 73 percent of the news directors expressed a preference for hiring men in most newsroom jobs. This finding was supported by the fact that only 4.7 percent of the broadcast employees in the stations surveyed were women.

When asked why they preferred to hire men, the reason most often given by the news directors was that men sound more authoritative while delivering the news on the air. More than 90 percent of the news directors surveyed felt that women's voices lacked the qualities necessary to sound authoritative.[2]

The result of these attitudes were born out by employment statistics gathered in a survey by the Radio and Television News Director's Association (RTNDA) in 1972.[3] The RTNDA survey followed in the wake of the National Organization of Women's (NOW) request that section VI of the FCC's Report and Order On Equal Employment be amended to include discrimination based on sex as part of the Equal Employment Opportunity Program.

Data in the RTNDA survey were analyzed separately for radio-only, TV-only, and joint radio-TV news operations. Although the results were somewhat more favorable for women than the 1965 Kienzle study, they still showed only a small percent of women employed in the news operations. Of the radio stations responding in the study, 85 percent indicated they had no full-time females in their news departments. Only half of the responding television stations said they had full-time women on their news staffs. It was found, however, that practically all of the stations employing newswomen were using at least one woman regularly for on-air reporting.

Up to this point, published studies in this area had only surveyed the attitude of news directors' about women in broadcast news and their estimation of their audience's reaction to a female newscaster. In 1972, Stone surveyed both news directors and a sample audience to see if, in fact, the attitudes of the news directors accurately relfected the attitudes of their broadcast audience.[4]

The researchers chose four available audience groups from contrasting generations and communities--university students and professors, fourth and fifth grade students in a small town, and the parents of the children.

Although TV news directors overwhelmingly thought their audiences would prefer a man in most reporting situations, at least half of every audience group surveyed said it did not matter to them what the sex of the newscaster was. Small town parents and their fourth and fifth grade sons were the most likely to say they would choose the newscast anchorec by a man.

In the area of "believability," TV news directors also over-estimated the audience's preference for men. The majority of the university students and professors had no preference. Parents and their children frequently said that it depended on the story. Although not more than one-fifth of any audience group said they would find a man more believable, over half of the news directors thought the majority of the audience would tend to believe a male newscaster more.

Studies such as this raise the question of whether news directors in many cases are assuming biases among audiences that don't actually exist.

Research Design

It was out of the rather limited research efforts cited that the present study was formulated. Three specific factors were selected for study for a male-female newscaster comparison--"effectiveness, "believability" and "acceptance."

A critical element in the design of a study such as this is obviously to try to insure that a newscast delivery of controlled quality be presented for audience evaluation. Unequal performances, reflecting different levels of competency or professional development could obviously bias results along non-sexual lines. Thus, four network newscasters, two males and two females, were chosen on the basis of similar professional competency and stature. They were: Sylvia Chase (CBS News), Harvey Hauptman (WCBS News Radio), Robert Glenn (WCBS Radio News), and Sharron Lovejoy (CBS News). The selection of two newscasters of each sex reduced the chances of preference resting on such things as personality,

reading style, etc. Each of the four recorded an audio tape in "network style" which contained two versions of a newscast. Each newscast contained two catagories of stories--factual and ficticious. Although the two versions of factual stories differed only in style (and not in factual content), the fictitious stories were selected because they lent themselves to the alteration of central facts. The newscasts will be discussed in more detail later.

The subjects (S's) used as sample audiences in the study were primarily members of various adult evening classes at a community college. In order to have representation from the over 65 age group, a small number of S's were added who were members of the Gainesville, Florida Older Americans' Council. This sample audience totaled 174 men and women who represented a rather broad socio-economic and age distribution.

Each of the eight audience groups heard two newscasts; one delivered by a male and one delivered by a female newscaster. This introduced two major elements to be considered: the sex of the newscaster and the playback order of the newscasts.

Although the sex of the newscaster is an obvious variable, the importance of varying the playback order may not be readily evident. What was being controlled here were the effects of recency and primacy. Would the S's tend to recall or possibly believe more of what they heard last (recency) or would the first newscast make more of an impression (primacy).

After hearing the tapes, each of the eight subject was asked to fill in two questionnaires. The first was a multiple-choice instrument

designed to measure factors of effectiveness, general retention, and believability. The second questionnaire (administered after the first one was collected to avoid "checking back" or changing answers for consistency) contained both multiple-choice and open-ended questions to study acceptance and preference.

The Experimental Newscasts

The experimental materials consisted of eight, four-minute tape recorded newscasts. To make them appear to be recordings of bona-fide newscasts, a standard broadcast news format was used. Anglo-saxon names were selected in order to eliminate the possibility of ethnic bias. The stations' call letters, WKLY and WSLA, were also fictitious. The newscasts were written in standard broadcast style, but each story was written in two ways to represent individual style differences which would be associated with different stations and newscasters.

The factual stories in the newscasts were based on the following items:

1. Aid to public schools
2. Watergate tapes
3. Salary hike for military doctors
4. Grain reserves
5. National health insurance

Audience retention of general information on these factual stories was checked by multiple-choice questions.

The important key to the experiment, however, rested on three

fictitious stories. These were news stories related to:

1. A Florida Supreme Court decision
2. A local judge's ruling on a case involving compensation payments to an injured athlete
3. A Missouri bank robbery.

These stories were loosely based on wire copy and were specifically selected because they lent themselves to a subtle substitution of basic facts.

Whereas the factual stories were used to test retention, the fictitious stories were included to study relative believability. The answer choices for these questions reflected both versions of the discrepant stories and a wrong answer. The S's were asked to indicate the answer they <u>believed</u> to be correct. Forced-choice required the S's to make a judgment on the perceived believability of the newscaster. This approach had been previously validated in a study by Orozco.[5]

For purposes of identification in the study, the newscasts were referred to as version A and version B. From Table 1, you will note that both newscasts lead with the same stories (stories 1-A and 1-B and 2-A and 2-B). The facts in these stories were consistent and only the written approach varied. The stories marked X, Y and Z, however, were the stories which had factual discrepancies.

For reasons of methodological design and response analysis, each newscast also contained a "unique" story and both ended with stories marked "same." The "unique" stories were completely different in both versions. This was to study effectiveness--whether S's tended to remember the unique story when delivered by a particular newscaster

TABLE I

STORY ARRANGEMENT

Version A	Version B
Opening A	Opening B
Story 1-A	Story 1-B
Story 2-A	Story 2-B
Story X-A	Story Y-B
Unique A	Story Z-B
Story Y-A	Story X-B
Story Z-A	Unique B
Same	Same
Closing A	Closing B

Each of the four newscasters recorded both A and B versions of the newscast and they were played back to the subject groups in the order shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

PLAYBACK ORDER

Group	1st Position	2nd Position
E-1	M-1-A	F-1-B
E-2	F-1-B	M-1-A
E-3	F-1-B	F-1-A
E-4	F-1-A	M-1-B
E-5	M-2-A	F-2-B
E-6	F-2-B	M-2-A
E-7	M-2-B	F-2-A
E-8	F-2-A	M-2-B

E = Experimental subject group. The A and B indicate the version of the newscast.

F-1 and F-2 = female newscasters

M-1 and M-2 = male newscasters

Findings

The data from the two questionnaires were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) computer program. The following briefly summarizes the findings of the study.

Acceptance (See Table 3)

1. There was no significant difference in the audience's degree of acceptance of either male or female newscaster (x^2 = .84, df. = 3, p .90).

2. A crosstabulation of the responses by the S's sex indicated that there was no significant difference in their acceptance of either sex newscaster.

3. Using a probability instrument and a 2 x j contingency table, it was found that over 50 percent of the S's said they would listen to either newscaster "fairly often" to "frequently." This was considered to be a strong vote of overall acceptance.

TABLE 3

ACCEPTANCE RATING OF NEWSCASTERS
(PERCENTS)

Category	Male Newscasters			Female Newscasters		
	M. S's	F. S's	Tot. S's	M. S's	F. S's	Tot. S's
1	14.9	12.9	14.0	16.0	7.1	11.7
2	37.9	31.8	34.9	33.3	31.8	32.6
3	28.7	27.1	27.9	26.4	32.9	29.7
4	18.4	28.2	23.3	24.1	28.2	26.2

N = 172

1 = never to rarely
2 = occasionally
3 = fairly often
4 = frequently

Effectiveness

The differences in the effectiveness of the newscasters was measured by the comparative retention rate on the "unique" stories when read by the male and female announcers. A lack of a statistically significant difference tends to indicate that the newscasters were equally effective.

Preference

1. About 50 percent of the S's indicated that they had no sex preference in a newscaster. Of the remaining S's, preference was almost equally divided between male and female newscasters.

2. There was no significant relationship between S's age or sex and their newscaster preference.

Playback Order

A primacy effect was found in that S's tended to believe the first newscast they heard, regardless of the newscaster's sex or the newscast version.

Implications

In studying what implications this research might have for broadcast management, a quote by Senator James Fulbright seems appropriate. He once told the Senate that, "We are handicapped by policies based on old myths rather than current realities."[6] The current reality suggested by this study is that audiences may be fully willing to accept a woman newscaster as being as credible and as acceptable as her male counterpart.

Though this study focused on the aural (radio-associated) elements of newscasting, the study might have implications for television as well. If nothing else, this study provides further evidence that some rather widespread beliefs about women in broadcast news reporting may not hold up in what Senator Fulbright calls "current reality."

FOOTNOTES

[1]"The New Breed," Newsweek, August 30, 1971, pp. 62-63.

[2]Kathleen Johanna Kienzle, "A Study of the Employment Opportunities for Women in Broadcast News" (unpublished Master's thesis, Ohio State University, 1965).

[3]Vernon Stone, "Radio and Television News Directors and Operations: An R-T-N-D-A Survey," Research report presented at the International Conference of the RTNDA, Nassau, Bahamas, Nov. 27 to Dec. 2, 1972.

[4]Vernon Stone, Jill Geisler, and Barbara Dell, "Attitudes Toward Television Newswomen," paper for joint meeting of the Minorities and Communication Division and Radio and Television Division, Association for Education in Journalism, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, August, 1972.

[5]Orzco, Elroy, "The Relative Credibility of Discrepant Radio Newscasts as a Function of Announcer Professionalism," (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Florida, 1973).

[6]Fulbright, James William, as cited by John Bartlett, Familiar Quotations (Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1968), pg. 1055.